

*Speech -*  
*Chas. A. Plants*  
SPEECH

OF

HON. T. A. PLANTS, OF OHIO,

ON

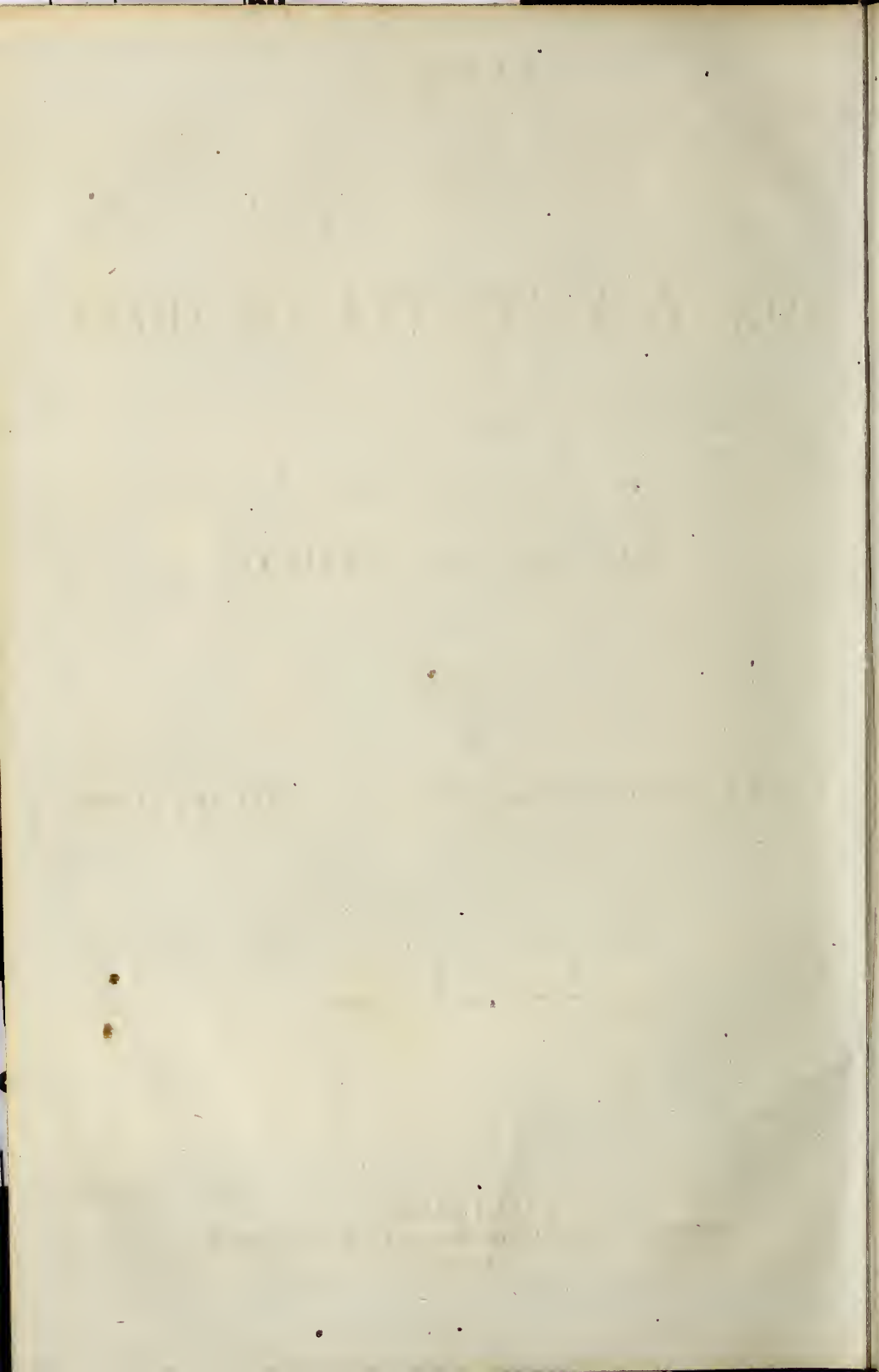
RECONSTRUCTION;

DELIVERED

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, FEBRUARY 24, 1866.

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1866.



## RECONSTRUCTION.

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The House, as in Committee of the Whole on the state of the Union, having under consideration the President's annual message—

Mr. PLANTS said:

Mr. SPEAKER: This day having been set apart for general discussion upon the state of the Union, I shall not confine my remarks to any single proposition before Congress, no one of which alone, but the whole series together, is expected to work out the desired "reconstruction," or, as I think it better expressed, "the readjustment of the rebel States to their normal relations to the other States in the Union." I have not the presumption to suppose I can greatly enlighten the House after the many able speeches already delivered. I shall, nevertheless, beg its indulgence, while I briefly express some general views upon the subject. But, in doing this, I shall at least avoid a repetition of what has already been said so much better than I could hope to express it. And if my remarks shall not depend for their force, if they shall have any, upon the technicalities of the lawyer or the *dicta* of the judge, it will be because in my opinion these are not wholly sufficient to account for our present condition or to give us the assurances of a happy deliverance.

Nor will I repeat again the story that we have passed through the most gigantic rebellion that ever raised a traitorous arm against a just and beneficent Government. All that has been said; and the rebellion, with all its horrors, depicted in every shade of coloring which rhetoric knows so well how to employ. But, while listening with equal pleasure and profit to the very able

arguments of those who have preceded me, I have been struck with the almost uniformly repeated declaration that "this was a perfectly causeless rebellion, that there was absolutely no cause at all for the war through which we have just passed." I do not know whether gentlemen mean anything more by this form of expression than that the North gave no provocation to the South to justify her in the desperate attempt she made to destroy the Government. In this sense the expression may be true, but it throws no light upon the subject nor does it give us any principle as a guide to the future. If anything, much more an event of the magnitude of the rebellion, could happen without a cause, then, indeed, would we be afloat upon a sea of chaos, where chart and compass would be but useless toys, and statesmanship a term without meaning.

But, Mr. Speaker, this is not so. Everywhere cause and effect are married together. No event ever did or ever can happen without a cause. And this is as true in the rise and fall of nations as in the simplest occurrence with which we are familiar. It is true of the scene through which we have passed. The rebellion had a cause—a sufficient, natural, necessary cause—from which it was evolved as naturally as the rose unfolds from the bud. And if this be so, then are those mistaken indeed who suppose that it originated in the disappointed ambition of a few aspiring demagogues on the election of Mr. Lincoln in 1860, as well as that other class of complacent philosophers who gravely tell us that if half a dozen on each side, including the gentleman from Pennsyl-

vanity of course, had been hung, all would have been peace and harmony.

No, sir, Jeff. Davis and his compeers were no more the cause of the war than the scum upon the surf is the cause of the surf itself. And I propose, if I can, to raise the curtain, and turn the gaze for awhile from the puppets on the stage to the machinery by which they were moved. If we can come to the rational perception that the rebellion was the legitimate and natural result of operating causes, and can clearly comprehend the causes themselves, we will be better prepared—adopting the axiom that “like causes will produce like results”—to bring to the solution of the grave problems before us the enlightened resources of statesmanship, instead of the blind prejudices of the partisan or the blinder passions of faction.

Let us see, then, if we can trace the rebellion and its consequences back to the germs from which they grew. For I maintain that all things with which we are surrounded, our institutions and ourselves as well, are subject to the universal law of growth. The very planet we inhabit has it written upon every stratum of its rocks. In the infinite varieties of vegetation which beautify and adorn its surface, we have “first the blade, then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear.” The animal grows; man, physically, mentally, morally, and socially grows; and the character which each one of us forms for himself is the result of the same law. The child inherits, by the very constitution of its being, the germs of all human possibilities; and its life’s work is to develop from them by the joint action of impulses from within and circumstances from without, a fixed and permanent character. It has the merely animal instincts, selfish propensities, that center all their activities in their own gratification, and also the higher sentiments which, fully developed, form the noblest work and image of God. And it is the contest for the mastery between these contending forces that makes the life of every one a grand battle-field and virtue and vice significant terms. The purely selfish impulses would grasp all within their reach, regardless of the rights of others, and degrade the other faculties to acquiescence in the demand, and when successful, present as perfect a specimen of an incarnate devil as it is possible for man to be-

come. Should the higher faculties on the other hand obtain the mastery, the result may be the development of all that is possible of human perfectibility.

To one, or the other of these states every one is moving, for there is no standing still in this race of destiny, and a man cannot be permanently divided against himself. He cannot deliberately continue to do what he acknowledges to himself and others to be wrong. He must either give up the wrong in obedience to the demands of his reason or he must suborn his reason to the sanction of the wrong. He must bring his head and heart into agreement—make his understanding approve that course of action which he has deliberately proposed to pursue. If he will practice wrong, he must bring himself to believe a corresponding lie, behind which he can hide himself and imagine himself hid from others. But this is a progressive work, a growth, no one coming to the full stature of a villain or the perfect measure of the noblest manhood but through this process. While he is in the poise and equilibrium of these contending impulses he is the subject of perpetual conflicts with himself. There is a war in his own members, a rebellion in his own organization, as fierce as that through which we have passed. He can only find peace when this conflict ceases by one or the other of these forces obtaining the mastery. Man never purposes to do a deed until he has first persuaded himself that, under the circumstances, he is somehow justified in doing it. He may, indeed, repent of it after it is done, but if so he must make restitution and do so no more or he must weave for himself a mantle of falsehood as a justification. There is not an irredeemable villain in your prisons, nor an outcast on your streets, that has not brought himself by some kind of sophistry to believe that he is justified in his deeds.

Thus, sir, and thus only is character formed. And what is true of the man is equally true of a community, which is but a man in a larger form, as our every-day language assumes when we speak of the whole people as the body-corporate. But this body-corporate is composed of all the individuals which make up the aggregate of its population. These individual men stand in the same relations to the “grand



man" as the separate faculties of the brain do to the individual. And as the individual man has in himself, by virtue of these faculties, the germs of all possibilities of human character, so this grand man, the body-corporate, being composed of men of all characters, has within it the germs of all possible institutions. And because it has thus within it the extremely selfish, who regard no man's rights, whose motto is, "Let him get who has the power, and let him keep who can," and also the highly developed and Christianized, whose motto is "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye so to them," and all grades between them, it follows that there will be a conflict in the community between these opposite principles and those who are actuated by them, just as in the man there is a conflict between his higher and baser impulses. The selfish and ambitious will strive to ultimate their purposes in the forms of the constitution, laws, and institutions of the community. Their constant effort will be by monopoly and class legislation to usurp the rights of the masses; and being unscrupulous as to means, they will resort to force or fraud to accomplish their purposes. And so far as this class succeed, the Government will grow up into an oligarchy, a monarchy, or a despotism.

On the other hand, those who do regard the rights of others will naturally strive to embody their sentiments into the constitution, laws, and institutions; and, as far and fast as they are able to control, the Government will take the form of a republic, where all are equally protected. And until the Government settles into one or the other of these forms there will be no permanent peace. The community, like the man, cannot be permanently divided against itself. The conflict may be long and the internal strife intense, but by the growth of one idea and the decay of the other, or by the suppression of one or the other by force, the State, like the man, will finally reach a fixed and permanent character. Till then internal harmony is impossible.

Hence it is seen that the constitutions, laws, and institutions of a country are as much a growth as the people themselves. You cannot from the study of the philosopher produce a constitution that would be found applicable to the actual life of a people. Our Constitution could not

be made to work smoothly if applied externally to any other nation, for the simple reason that, not being an outgrowth from that people, it would not meet their wants. It has worked well with us in the main, because it was an outgrowth from the people. The great and good men who put it into form did not make it. They simply embodied the average outgrowth of the social and political life of the people into the forms adapted to their then existing wants. But it was necessarily impossible for them to frame an instrument that would be adequate in all future time to the wants of an advancing people. This is demonstrated in the whole of our past history, which shows that a progressive people cannot be long confined within the rigid terms of a written constitution.

No man reveres the memory of the fathers more than I do, and it is doing them no dishonor to say that they could not accomplish impossibilities. But it was simply impossible for them to frame an instrument suited to the condition of a people in one age and under one set of circumstances that would be equally applicable to them at another age and under different circumstances. And so our fathers thought, and hence in the Constitution which they gave us they wisely provided for its amendment as the development and growth of the people should demand.

I do not, therefore, share at all in the seeming dread of certain gentlemen at the suggestion of any changes in that instrument. I believe, indeed, that change should be made with great deliberation, if made at all; and I think some two or three of the amendments proposed should pass. I will cordially support them, believing, as I do, that they will prove very useful and help the nation's progress. But I do not think that all progress will stop even if none of these changes are effected by way of amendment.

Sir, without any formal amendments the Constitution has changed, and will continue to change, with the ever-changing wants and will of the people. Gentlemen need not start at this proposition. I will demonstrate it by the declaration of all men of all parties, as well as by our current history. Why, it must be so. The shell of an oyster changes with the expanding growth of the life within. England has a constitution quite as much talked about in her

Parliament as ours is here, and quite as well defined. Yet who ever read the constitution of England? It was never written, and never adopted by convention or otherwise. It is simply the outgrowth of a thousand years of the wants and need of that progressive people.

And after all, Mr. Speaker, what is our Constitution? Sir, it is like the unwritten constitution of England or the written Bible—precisely what the prevailing sentiment makes it by interpretation. I need not go out of this Hall for proof of this proposition. Many times every day since the meeting of Congress I have listened to gentlemen gravely quoting the Constitution to sustain some favorite idea, while the gentleman who has succeeded him in debate has as gravely quoted the same Constitution to sustain an exactly opposite idea. No scheme so absurd and no proposition so atrocious but has found a guarantee in the Constitution according to those who have proposed them. Were these gentlemen necessarily insincere? I do not think so. But the question pertinently returns, what to them respectively is the Constitution? Manifestly it is not the written words of the fathers alone, but those words as interpreted and construed by each gentleman for himself; and that construction necessarily, but perhaps unconsciously to him, affected by his strong conviction of the importance to the country or himself of some favorite theory or measure which he wishes to see ingrafted into the policy of the country. No one will deny this.

But in further confirmation of my position, I am sure I could have the unanimous indorsement of every member of this House of whatever party. Certainly, every Union man will agree with me, that while the Democrats were in power they perverted many of the most important features of the Constitution in their infatuated devotion to the institution of slavery. Indeed, the great Union party charged the Democracy with the unpardonable offense of subsidizing the court of last resort to give it an interpretation directly the reverse of that intended by its framers, and to deliberately falsify all history to give that construction even a show of plausibility. But, sir, the interpretation given by the Supreme Court to the Constitution is, while it stands, to all practical intents the Con-

stitution itself. So that it only requires acquiescence in such construction to change the instrument at the will of the judges. And nothing but the hurling of that party from power by an indignant people, and the change of the majority of the court by the treason and death of its members, prevents the Constitution to-day from being the loathsome thing which that party proclaimed it to be.

And I am quite as sure that every Democrat present will repeat at my call, what they have every day repeated, that the Union party have perverted and still pervert that sacred instrument from its true intent and meaning. In the authoritative convention of that party they solemnly declared that President Lincoln and those who supported his Administration, had violated the Constitution in every particular. But how did they violate it? By their interpretation if at all, for they conformed their policy to its requirements as they construed it. And if the Union party remains in power, they will very likely continue to hold pretty much the same general principles, progressing of course with the increasing advancement of the age; and if the Supreme Court as it will hereafter be constituted, shall substantially agree with them, how will the gentlemen help themselves? In that case, we will have the same Constitution that Taney construed, but no "Dred Scott decisions" will be deduced from it forevermore. And this, the gentleman from New Jersey and all his followers will testify will be a total change of the instrument.

My purpose, Mr. Speaker, in these illustrations, is to demonstrate that the constitutions, laws, and institutions of a people are but the outgrowth of the wants, development, and the culture of that people, and are unfolded from them by this same natural process of growth. I said, Mr. Speaker, that the community has within it the germs of all possible forms of government by reason of the various characters of the individuals who compose it, just as the child has in it the germs of all possibilities of character by virtue of its various faculties. Our country was and could be no exception to this rule. In its organization the good and the bad, the educated and the ignorant, the simple and the crafty, the benevolent and the selfish, the inborn democrat and the natural tyrant, were the innate



faculties, so to speak, of this grand man, the body-corporate. And out of these jarring and discordant elements were to be evolved in the progress of the community, the constitution, the laws, and the institutions that were eventually to form its permanent character. Selfish men would gladly have made everything subservient to their own aggrandizement, and to accomplish this would have formed an oligarchy, a monarchy, or a despotism. Good men would gladly have laid the foundations of the structure upon the broad principles of right and justice, and would have embodied them into the forms of a pure republic. Neither party was then strong enough absolutely to control the other, and the result was a compromise.

I do not, Mr. Speaker, complain of the fathers for this compromise; it really satisfied nobody at the time, yet all accepted it as the best they could get, and trusted to the future to secure such changes as they severally desired. It was, no doubt, under the then existing circumstances all that ought to have been expected. But it is hardly worth while for us at this day to worship blindly, as perfection, that which by the common consent of those who framed it was not perfect, and which has been, by the charges of all parties disregarded, and most profanely broken and trampled upon ever since. I yield, sir, to no man living in my devotion to the Constitution; while I am not conscious of a very profound reverence for anybody's construction of it which does not happen to coincide with my own. And in this, sir, my singularity probably consists in the simplicity that permits the utterance of it. We all now see the error of admitting into it, even by compromise, the seeds of civil strife. And if "history is philosophy teaching by example," it is surely the part of statesmen so instructed not to sow again the seeds of a like harvest for our children.

This, Mr. Speaker, brings me to the subject of slavery. And I do not mean by this term merely its vulgar and brutal side as seen in the "harem, the slave-pen, the auction-block, the shambles, the coffin-gang, and the bloody lash of the chivalric Democrat as he extorted unpaid labor from whipped and fettered women!" I mean, sir, that selfishness which disregards the rights of

others. And this, sir, which is the essential spirit of slavery, can never be located within geographical lines, or limited to any particular color of the skin. It may be just as active and remorseless in the home of the domestic tyrant in Massachusetts as upon the cane-fields of Louisiana.

I have, therefore, no indiscriminate eulogies for all the inhabitants of one section and denunciations of those of another. It wanted but the favoring circumstances to have made many a northern man a slaveholder in fact, and many a slaveholder in the South has been a true friend of freedom and mankind. Our whole history shows that many of the meanest and most unscrupulous supporters of the system were northern men who never owned a slave, while many of the truest friends of their country stood in the relation of master; and it requires but little argument to scatter the miserable sophistry that in this Hall so persistently attempts to justify the whole infernal system by the atrocious falsehood that Washington was its champion!

At the formation of the Constitution slavery unfortunately existed in nearly all the States. But it was the common expectation and belief that it would soon be abolished in them all, as it was the common sentiment that it was an outrage upon the rights of humanity, and the source of infinite danger if perpetuated. It was this common expectation and belief which led to the still more unfortunate recognition of it in the Constitution. For in this accursed institution, the selfish and tyrannical found a central rallying point, which naturally drew together and to concert of action all the elements of reckless disregard of human rights, corresponding in the body-corporate to the animal propensities in the man; while around the glorious doctrine of human brotherhood clustered the pure and good of all sections, corresponding to the higher faculties of the individual. And now commenced the "irrepressible conflict." For until then no one thought of permanently maintaining the system which all admitted to be wrong. But then, too, came into force the pressure of the law before referred to, and which operates upon men and communities alike, that neither can continue to practice what is at the same time admitted to be wrong. The thing is impossible in human ac-

tion. Those, therefore, who maintained the iniquity of the system were compelled by this law of necessity to look and labor for its extirpation. Among these were Washington, Jefferson, Madison, and their compeers, who, while holding the relation of masters to slaves, were never imbued with its spirit, never justified it, never by one word in all their writings gave it their sanction; but through all their lives looked and prayed and labored for its abolition; and most of them, at their deaths, if not before, emancipated those they held.

It requires, Mr. Speaker, an audacity that rises to the sublime for gentlemen upon this floor to represent these friends of freedom whose names grace the brightest pages of our history as the champions of slavery, and to hold up their temporary and unwilling connection with it as its perfect sanctification. No, sir; they never were slaveholders in spirit and purpose; never made themselves such by justifying to themselves and the world the system which they always deplored and hoped to see exterminated.

But there was another and different class of men, who, finding that the institution ministered to their pecuniary gain and political importance and the gratification of their lusts, determined that the system should be perpetuated. And then it became necessary that such should justify themselves, for it was not possible that they could stand up in the face of the world self-acknowledged criminals, and proclaim their purpose to remain such. For slavery is absolutely right or it is, indeed, "the sum of all villainies." It is true, the arguments they used never imposed upon honest men, and were not at first expected to do so. The object was to silence their own consciences while any conscience remained. And it must be remembered that when a man has become depraved enough deliberately to say, "Evil, be thou my good," he has crucified conscience and is "given over to believe a lie" corresponding to his state. It matters not, then, how utterly absurd the sophistry is; and in fact the more preposterous the easier he can impose it upon his own willing but perverted intellect, and the stronger will become his delusion that he can hide behind it from the burning gaze of others.

Why, sir, this is perfectly manifest from the rehash we are having here from day to day of

the old stale arguments which were used by the slaveholders and their tools when they had the logic of the mob and the eloquence of the bludgeon to enforce them. And what are these arguments?

First, "the negroes are an inferior race." Suppose that to be true. Is it anything more or less than the naked doctrine that might makes right? On this theory the strong have a right to trample upon the weak everywhere. Is it any wonder that the land is full of violence? No man is safe where such a sentiment prevails, and freedom is impossible where such men can seize upon power. If the negroes are an inferior race it is a very good reason why they should be treated kindly and aided in their efforts at elevation, but none at all why to their natural misfortune should be added the intolerable load of oppression. But is it not barely possible that it is not so much the belief of the inferiority of the negro as the fear of his rivalry that occasions a good share of the "negrophobia" with which so many are afflicted? But the argument shows how utterly men can pervert their reason. It is right, nay, chivalric, to enslave the negro because he is inferior! It must be chivalric, then, for a strong man to assault a cripple without provocation, simply because he is too weak to defend himself! Why not? We have had the argument repeated here *ad nauseam*.

But another argument is that they were born slaves, and therefore it was right to hold them as such. Born slaves? How did that happen? Could there have been any slaves in the Union at the date of Lincoln's proclamation if somebody had not reduced them to that condition, first kidnapping them? I do not mean the stealing of their ancestors from Africa, but the children from the negro huts of the South. Could one of them possibly have been a slave unless some one had taken him at some time of his life and by force held and used him as such? "Ah! but they were born slaves!" Sir, they were born just as other people were, and were no more slaves than others until somebody committed just that crime, by whatever name you chose to call it, that he would have committed if he had gone to the cradle and trundled in your home, Mr. Speaker, and taken your children and held them as slaves.



"But their mothers were slaves, and of course that made the children slaves likewise." Then you have a perfect right to go into your neighbor's house and assault and beat his children, provided you take the precaution first to assault and insult their mother! First kick a woman and that will give you a clear right to cuff her children. "But the law made slaves of all the children of slave women." Did it indeed? And who made the law, pray? And what was it? Why the slaveholders and their abettors, of course, made the law, and it was just this, no more and no less: they bound themselves together by the most solemn pledges to stand by and aid each other in compelling these people to work for nothing all their lives under the lash, while the conspirators lived in idleness and lust; and to torture even to death any of them that refused or tried to escape. And when they put that pledge into the form of a law they held it up, in the innocence of their souls, as a perfect justification.

What would you think, Mr. Speaker, if a dozen ordinary thieves and burglars should meet and resolve—and put it in the exact form of a section of the slave code—that at midnight to-night they would break into your house and rob you, and murder you if you resisted; and to-morrow, with the plunder in their hands, should publicly hold out their "law" as a full and complete warrant for the deed? But, sir, such an act would be innocence itself compared with the crime of slavery, for it would leave you and your posterity still untouched, while the slaveholder strikes humanity itself from the brow of the slave, and classes him with and treats him as a brute.

"But God and the Bible sanctioned and sanctified it!" Did He? Would you, Mr. Speaker, sanction one of your children in seizing another of the common family and making him his slave, and treating him as such? If not, why not? Are you better than God? And if to claim your sanction for such a deed in your family would be a slander upon you, what perdition is deep enough to engulf the blasphemer who impiously claims the sanction of the universal Father for the act? Yet all this we are doomed to hear from day to day upon this floor, notwithstanding slavery has been forever abolished by the amendment to the Constitution.

But the gentleman from New Jersey [Mr. ROGERS] does not acquiesce in that amendment. So sacred a thing is slavery in his eyes that he deliberately declared, in his place, that in his opinion the people of the United States could not by their unanimous vote, and that ratified by every State but Kentucky, abolish slavery in that State without her consent. And he announced to us that until Kentucky ratified the amendment, as she does not intend to do, it will be perfectly inoperative, and that consequently slavery is not abolished. I did not suppose that the Democratic party, as such, would take that position. But, as the gentleman referred to is the acknowledged leader in this House, I shall wait to see how the party falls into rank. The gentleman fortified his constitutional argument by the theological one affirming that neither Christ nor His apostles ever condemned slavery, although they lived all their lives in a land of slaves.

Let us look where this would lead. I do not propose to answer the gentleman, but to say that he has got off the negro there, unconsciously, of course. It is true that Rome, in the days of Christ and His apostles, from her seven-hilled city ruled the world and filled it with slaves. But they were not negroes. Our ancestors from England were then bought and sold like sheep and oxen in her shambles. If Christ and His apostles sanctioned slavery then, it was the enslavement of white men, and our ancestors among them. And Athens, that other miscalled republic, was also referred to as holding slaves. She did so, but they were not negroes. Her twenty-five thousand citizens held five hundred thousand slaves. But, sir, they were as white as their masters. Sir, every such argument is an argument for the enslavement of white men. Are gentlemen ready to go before the country upon that issue?

But here the gentleman turns round and, leaving his Bible argument, lights again upon the negro, and declares, in justification of the system, that he has always been a slave. I deny the fact. The enslavement of the negro is of modern invention. But it would be very dangerous as well as illogical to make it a justification of slavery. Has not the white man been enslaved, too? I have just shown that the slaves of Greece and Rome were white. And has

freedom been the happy lot of all white men in modern times? Go to the slave marts of Constantinople, to-day, and you will see the whitest people of Europe upon the auction-block—the beautiful virgins of Circassia and Georgia. Go to Russia, and among all her twenty-five millions of late slaves, just emancipated, thank God! there was not a negro. And even in our own sunny South the negro was fast disappearing, and the blood of the chivalry blushed in the bleached cheeks of her slaves as they sold their own sons and daughters. And why not? Is it any more wrong to enslave a white man than a black one? And would he who justifies the enslavement of the negro on any of these grounds hesitate a moment to enslave you, Mr. Speaker, and your children, if he had the power? Why, one would think, from the speeches of gentlemen, that a white skin was everywhere a perfect protection against all wrong, and that nobody had ever been oppressed but the negro.

But is this so? Where are the toiling millions of all the white nations to-day? Look at England! Look at Austria! Look at France! Look at all the petty despotisms of Europe that are grinding the toiling millions of the white race into the earth! What do tyrants care for the color of those they oppress? Did the perjured traitor who clambered over the hecatombs of his murdered countrymen to place the throne of his bastard empire upon the ruins of the republic he had sworn to support stop to look at the color of his victims? If I am rightly informed, the French people are not negroes! Sir, the inborn tyrant cares nothing for the color of those he tramples upon. He would place his foot upon the naked, quivering, palpitating heart of humanity as a stepping-stone to power; and this eternal harping upon the negro is continued here only because it is thought he can be used to arouse the prejudices of the selfish and brutal to the political advantage of those who have no other capital.

I must be permitted, Mr. Speaker, to refer for a moment to one other gentleman, the gentleman from Kentucky, [Mr. HARDING.] He declared in his place that the constitutional amendment had robbed the slaveholders of Kentucky of \$100,000,000! Yes! robbery was the word, and often repeated. You heard his bitter denunciations of this robbery and his

demand for compensation. But how were they robbed? Strip the gentleman's speech of its superfluities and venom and it was just this: "We, the thirty thousand slaveholders of Kentucky, were living comfortably, and even luxuriantly, upon the negroes. When the negro earned a dollar we took it away from him and spent it. If he raised a chicken we went to the roost and carried it away and ate it. If we became 'hard up' to pay a debt of honor, or otherwise, we went into his cabin and took one of his children and sold it, and if the frantic mother made an outcry we silenced her with the lash! This is the way we lived, and we lived well; and but for your tyrannical and unconstitutional interference we could have extorted and tortured \$100,000,000 out of the negroes of that State. You have prevented us from doing this, and have thereby taken the bread from our mouths and left our wives and children to starve, and we therefore demanded compensation!" Sir, I have not misstated the gentleman's argument. I need not answer it.

We have had all this intermingled with interminable harangues about a white man's Government. I believe every gentleman on the other side has harped upon that string, assuring us that the essence of democracy is a white man's Government. Why, sir, every despotism in Europe to-day is a white man's Government. The struggling Pole, the patient Austrian, the versatile Frenchman, the impulsive Irishman, are each enjoying the beatitudes of this democratic elysium—white men's Governments. Sir, with the teachings of history before me, I prefer some other guarantee than a mere white man's Government. We had that under the Democratic party, in the bosom of which the rebellion was hatched, and could have it again, under the same party, by admitting these same conspirators back to their vacant seats to join with those occupying like seats not vacated. For myself, Mr. Speaker, I prefer a republican Government, founded upon the rights of man and administered in equity, to a despotism, however white the despot may be.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to reply to several gentlemen on the other side, but as my time is growing short, and ammunition nearly exhausted, I shall not aim at any one in particular, but fire into the flock, and if any one should hap-



pen to be hit we will know by the fluttering. Sir, some of my friends on this side of the House cannot believe that gentlemen on the other side are in earnest in all this. I do not agree with them. I believe they are most thoroughly in earnest. I recently spent an hour in a mad-house. I there saw men in every stage of mania, and all in the most absolute earnest. Among them was a man of evident culture, who for six weary years had perambulated the halls of the institution with a paper fool's-cap on his head for a crown and a straw in his hand for a scepter, proclaiming himself the Emperor of all the Indies. Touch his crown or his scepter and he went into spasms until it was returned. Now, does any one suppose that he could make such an exhibition of himself if he did not most thoroughly believe in the truth of his hallucination? No, the misfortune in his case was that he did believe it. And I am convinced that this is just what ails the gentlemen on the other side of the House. I have long believed the doctrine I am advancing as a most rational theory, but wanted such practical examples as would place it among the philosophical axioms. Hence, while the gentlemen were giving utterance to their astounding vagaries I watched them with intense interest, believing that the curious phenomena thus exhibiting would either confirm my theory or forever upset it. I am happy to say that it is a theory no longer, but a truth demonstrated. For I declare here, that through all the amusing but sad performance I detected no blush upon any cheek, nor a single face of all the performers suffused with shame. Could this have been the case if gentlemen had not believed what they said? Sir, if they had not believed their phantasies as undoubtingly as my friend the Emperor of the Indies did his their cheeks must have flushed crimson though cased in triple plates of copper. Yes, they did believe it, and if gentlemen upon this floor, who have not a single negro to bless themselves with, can play such tricks upon their intellects, what might not the slaveholders themselves believe?

Sir, the slaveholders did bring themselves to believe that they had a right to hold slaves, that God and nature and the Constitution sanctified and sanctioned and guaranteed it to them. And, so believing, they believed they had a right to all

the means requisite to their full enjoyment of that guarantee. But they could not be secure in this right if the slaves were acknowledged to be men; and they therefore had the right to class and treat them as brutes and punish with death the crime of teaching a slave to read. Again, the system would not be secure if men in the slave States were permitted to discuss the matter in any form, and hence the freedom of speech and the press must be suppressed as the highest of crimes; and no man could utter the simplest truths but at the risk of his life. For more than a quarter of a century the world knew no despotism so absolute and relentless as that which ruled the South.

Again, they could not fully enjoy their guarantees if shut up in their original boundaries, and therefore they had a right to take them into all the common Territories. Need I repeat the story of Kansas which shook the nation to its center, and culminated in the immortal infamy of the Dred Scott decision? The *dictum* is there laid down that "Slaves are property, just as horses, and mules, and agricultural implements are property," and which has been so extravagantly eulogized upon this floor. From that *dictum* naturally unfolded the laws of Kansas, which, if in force to-day, would hie you, Mr. Speaker, to the dungeon or the gibbet, if found with a copy of the Chronicle or the Globe in your trunk, though used only as wrapping paper. And all that was right if slavery was right. But, by logical necessity, that same decision carried slavery with all its consequences into all the States. Under the Constitution the citizen of one State has a right to take his horses, his mules, and his agricultural implements into any other State, and use and work and sell them there. But if slaves were property under the Constitution, just as these were, then they might be taken into any other State and used and worked and sold there. No ingenuity can escape the conclusion if the premises are admitted. But if they had a right to take and hold their slaves in the free States, they had a right to do it in safety, and as they could not hold them safely where dissent was permitted, all dissent must be suppressed by the strong hand of power. Will any one dare to say that this would not have been the next step if the Democratic party had



continued in power? No honest man doubts it. And can any one fail to see that this conflict had progressed until the contending forces were brought face to face, and that only one of two things remained possible—either the utter destruction of slavery or the total extinguishment of freedom.

Between these two there was no place for a third, no possibility even for further compromise. The friends of freedom and mankind could not, nay, they dared not, consent to their own enslavement, and with that the destruction of our republican Government and the hopes of the world. And the slave power, if it intended to maintain the system as it did, could not and dared not consent to anything less than the absolute and perpetual destruction of liberty. Why, sir, here was the whole argument in a sentence: "By the laws of God and nature, by the guarantees of the Constitution, and the decision of the Supreme Court, we have a right to hold slaves just as and where other property can be held. This right and guarantee carry with them all the incidents necessary to their safe enjoyment. But if free speech and a free press and popular education are permitted, the very existence of slavery will be endangered, and they must therefore be suppressed." And who could answer the argument? The only answer possible was to take away the premises, to deny the right to hold slaves at all. That right was denied, and its denial made further diplomacy impossible. The next step, the only possible next step, was the clash of arms. The bud had unfolded, the rose bloomed, the rebellion was inaugurated, and war shook the continent. In this contest the absolute triumph of one of these contending principles and the death of the other became necessary. Sir, men work better than they know. In the depth of the dark, deep sea, the coral insect works from age to age, blindly, but to a grand purpose nevertheless. And so man works often as blindly as the insect, but to the accomplishment of divine purposes still. For,

"Troubles spring not from the ground,  
Nor pain from chance.  
Eternal order circles round,  
And storm and wave find meet and bound  
In Providence."

—And hence, regardless of what our leading

men thought or wished or purposed, the contest could not stop until either slavery or freedom found its eternal tomb! And, thank God, it was slavery that died, and in its death has made the progress of freedom possible, and the glory of our country and the redemption of a race a certainty in the future.

Sir, I am not easily moved, but I confess to a little impatience, sitting here from day to day and hearing the members of the great Union party to which I am proud to belong denounced as radicals, fanatics, revolutionists, disunionists, and enemies of the country, by gentlemen whose position, if not their purpose, makes them the accomplices of traitors. I say accomplices, for effects follow causes regardless of men's motives. Arsenic kills without respect to the mode in which it finds access to the human organism. If taken to commit suicide it does its work. If placed in your food by the assassin it performs its work as well. And if taken from the hand of your physician and friend its work is still the same—death; not from the motive of the actors, but from the relation established between the drug and the organization. And so results follow from the position men occupy without regard to their motives.

It is the position of the Opposition, then, with which I am dealing, and I shall leave their motives to be accounted for by themselves. And I say here in my place, without following our brave boys through rebel prison-pens and bloody battle-fields to unmarked graves, that every one of them owes his murder more to northern Democratic ballots than to southern Democratic bullets. Not so much, sir, to the armed rebel at the South as to his Democrat fellow-partisan at the North is the mother indebted for the massacre of her son, the wife of her husband, and the orphaned children of their father. For every life so sacrificed and dollar expended and debt incurred do I hold those and their partisans responsible, who with brazen cheeks hurl these epithets at us. I came here, sir, expecting, for a time at least, to be a silent member doing my duty in a quiet way, as I have been doing so far. But I will not sit still any longer and hear this language repeated without retorting as I think it deserves. I said I held the northern Democrats responsible for all the horrors of the rebellion, and I repeat it. I do not say nor care

whether they cherished conscious treason in their hearts or only the reckless passions of partisan hate. Their position in relation to the contest was the same in either case, as I will proceed to demonstrate.

Sir, men are moved to action by motives; and no motive is strong enough to move them at all that does not hold out some hope of success. Strike hope from the heart and you paralyze the arm. No enterprise can be commenced without there is some hope of carrying it through, nor can it be continued when all hope is taken away. Jeff. Davis and his co-conspirators in the South would not, nay, they could not, have struck the first blow but for the hope they indulged of accomplishing their fell purpose. But if the whole North had been united in sustaining the Government, he could not have had any hope of its overthrow. It was simply from expectation of aid from the northern wing of the party that made the first blow a possibility. And were they not justified in their expectations?

Who had been the leaders of the party for years? Just the leaders of the rebellion, whom gentlemen are clamoring to admit again to the vacant seats by their sides, that legislation may be expedited by the bowie-knife and the bludgeon, as of old. Davis, Breckinridge, Stephens, Mason, Slidell, Benjamin, Hunter, Wise, and their like, ruled the party as they ruled their slaves; and never slaves obeyed masters more servilely, only these surpassed their masters in the audacity of their abuse of Union men. Why, every dirty paper and dirtier demagogue poured out their tirades upon the friends of the Union in terms in which falsehood and vulgarity struggled for the preëminence. Abolitionists, Black Republicans, fanatics, disunionists, amalgamationists, woolly heads, nigger worshipers were the gentlest terms employed, and these were howled out as incessantly as dogs bay at the full moon. Not one of them, from their President down, that did not threaten treason if the people should elect Lincoln. I need not repeat these threats. They are burned into the memories of all loyal men. And if they believed one hundredth part of what they said it was nothing but the sheerest cowardice that prevented them from taking up arms with their nobler brethren.

The rebels did look for the aid of northern Democrats. They had a right to look for it, and they received it in every form in which it could safely be given. And what was the position of the party after the war began? Did they give aid to the Government in the hour of its mortal peril? Sir, instead, they pronounced every measure of the Government unconstitutional, every act of the Administration a usurpation, every movement of our troops an outrage upon the rights of the people. The soldiers were denounced as Lincoln's hirelings, abolition cut-throats, fanatical murderers, fighting to enslave the white man and elevate the negro. Every falsehood that ingenuity could invent, and every vulgar prejudice that malignity could inflame were brought to bear against the Administration to embarrass it in its efforts to save the Union. Instead of flying to the insulted standard of their country, they slunk into the dark lodges of Knights of the Golden Circle, and binding themselves together by blasphemous oaths that linked them in fellowship with their like in the South, plotted sedition and planned conspiracies which gave courage and hope and strength to the rebels. Who dares to deny this? Sir, the South did rely upon the Democratic party of the North, and drew all the inspiration it ever had from that source.

So went on the first years of the war of arms in the South and of plottings in the North, until another presidential election approached. They were assured and believed that by the party and the means I have been describing, Lincoln's reëlection could be defeated; and, if failing in that, his murder had been decreed. For that Booth planned the assassination no sane man believes. That it was the crime of those whose madness had already murdered a quarter of a million of his countrymen every sane man knows. And it was only when the hope of his defeat at the election and of anarchy on his assassination failed, that the arm of the rebellion was unnerved and the confederacy died.

I repeat, then, that I hold those responsible who gave this hope and courage to the rebels. Nay, I hold them responsible to-day for all the scenes of outrage transpiring in the South, and the difficulties in the way of reconstruction.



When the rebel armies were crushed and all hope was dead they would willingly have accepted conditions based upon justice and right, and in time would have been content. But here stood this same party still denouncing, not the President now, but the Representatives of the loyal people, and, with the ingenuity of fiends, induced the rebels to believe a most monstrous and preposterous lie. At least I hope it is, for I am not willing to believe that it can possibly be true!

They tell these unrepentant rebels, whose hands are yet red with blood of the assassinated Lincoln, that the man whom that assassination made Lincoln's successor is false to the loyal and confiding people who elected him, and has, in heart, and intends, in act, to betray them! I repeat, sir, I cannot believe there is any truth in this representation. A treachery so base, a betrayal so damning transcends my powers of conception. They probably rely upon the simple fact that the President once belonged to their party. But I am not prepared to admit that no man can be trusted that ever did so. I am sure we have many loyal Democrats in the great Union party who did not enter it merely to betray, and I am not prepared to exclude the President from the honored number. But, unfortunately for the country, the southern rebels do believe it.

And now, instead of accepting those terms that would insure the peace and freedom of the country and make their own States the garden of the world, they arrogantly demand their own terms, as if they were conquerors—terms that sow the present thick with the seeds of another rebellion. And I charge whatever of trouble this new phase of affairs may bring upon the country to the Opposition on this floor and the partisans they lead. Sir, I consider this attempt to damn the President to eternal infamy by their championship a more cruel act than the murder of his predecessor. That gave Lincoln's name to immortality embalmed in a nation's benedictions; this, if believed, gives the name of his successor to immortality, too, but with a nation's curses. And what made the outrage more inexcusable was that it was supposed the high position of the President would prevent him from noticing the slander, and his constrained silence would be illogically construed into assent.

And now, sir, having paid my most respectful compliments to the Opposition, I am brought more directly to the policy of "reconstruction." And if I am correct in my theory, then the future as well as the past will be controlled by the same necessary law of growth. We may amend the Constitution and enact whole volumes of laws, but they will not make us at once a homogeneous people. That, sir, must be the work of time and causes lying back of these laws and resolutions, and it is upon these causes which operate as certain as the decrees of God that I rely, and rely without doubting, for the solution of our troubles. The interminable controversy as to whether the rebel States are in the Union or out of it, is, in my opinion, as perfectly immaterial as the arguments on the opposite sides, however able, have been inconsequential and unsatisfactory. And I shall not, Mr. Speaker, add to the "list of the unfortunates" by another attempt to settle a question which, however settled, would still leave us just where we are.

Leaving that question to those who may still choose it as the theme of their disquisitions, I have simply to say that I have full faith that the wisdom and patriotism of Congress, with or without the aid of the President, will prove adequate to carry through such amendments and measures as will remove any fatal obstructions, and justify the early admission of Senators and Representatives from all the States that will send such as are qualified to take their seats, and that time and natural causes will work out the desired result. Of that result I have no fears at all. A time to try men's souls may be, probably is, just before us. Darkness and doubt may pervade the land for a time, but it will only make the true truer, and bind in closer bonds the friends of justice and right. Treachery and disaffection may thin the ranks of the friends of freedom, but cannot break the solidity of the phalanx. We may be called to more earnest work, but working with the movements of Providence, the workers become omnipotent. Revolutions in that direction never go backward. The revolution in public sentiment in the last twenty-five years has been so rapid and so pronounced that to doubt the future would be to ignore the past.

Sir, we are in the morning light of an age of progress such as the world never enjoyed be-



fore, and in a nation whose future glory and grandeur it has never entered into the imagination of man to conceive. We took our place in the family of nations but a single age ago. We then numbered thirteen feeble States, impoverished by the long struggle for independence, with only three million people, and clogged with the incubus of slavery. The country was then chiefly a wilderness. We had neither manufactures nor commerce. Telegraph and railroads were unknown and undreamed of. Steam had not then come to the aid of muscle in the production and transportation of wealth. The arts and sciences were in their infancy, compared with what they are now, and we were pressed down with an almost unbearable burden of debt.

From that point we started in the race of national development and progress. That progress is in my opinion but a faint prophecy of the future. But the census shows that we have doubled our population and far more than doubled our wealth every twenty-five years. We are to-day a mighty nation, with thirty-six great States and territory enough for forty more, and a population of thirty-five millions. The arts and sciences have advanced more in their practical application to the uses of life than in all the centuries before. Popular education and enlightenment has increased in a like ratio. Our manufactories, weaving and forging to the music of the water-wheel and the engine, rival those of the oldest nations. Our merchant princes compete successfully in all the marts of the world, and make all nations tributary to us by their commerce. Our machinery and improved implements have multiplied our powers of production more than a hundred-fold, so that Massachusetts alone has to-day the wealth-producing power of more than a hundred million laborers. Our broad land is checkered with railroads, and our rivers and lakes are covered with steamers. Our mountains are pillared up with inexhaustible mineral wealth waiting development. Our illimitable prairies invite the toiling millions of the earth to build their homes in their bosoms. Every variety of soil and climate and our natural position combine to make our country the Eden of the world. And O, thank God! the shackles have been stricken from the limbs of the slave,

and we have become the land of the free forevermore!

And now, sir, at this commencement of our regenerated life, and standing on this out-look, the panorama unrolls a scene of glory and grandeur, more sublime and inspiring than ever prophet saw in the moment of his most enraptured vision. From the happy homes of millions of emigrants letters are wafted from day to day to the less happy homes of the millions of their friends in their fatherlands. As these letters are read, the wondrous story of the success of the writers thrills every heart. As they thus learn that here is a land where aristocracy is unknown and worth alone ennobles; where all men are free; where labor is adequately rewarded and the laborer respected; where the child of the emigrant is welcomed to the school and his father to the ballot; where the son of the humblest toiler may look forward to the attainment of any position, the attraction will become irresistible, and where one has come to us in the past a hundred will come in the future. From the mines and factories and forges of England they will come to mine and weave and forge here. From the oppressed but ever-green island they will come to build our future railroads and our expanding cities. From the sunny plains and vine-covered hills of Italy and France and Germany they will come to cover our hills with vines and our plains with culture. And with this stream of glorious workers will mingle the universal Yankee, and the two millions of our more glorious soldiers, made nobler and better by the toils they have endured and the patriotism that inspired the endurance, and this mighty tide, restless and ever-increasing in volume, will roll to the South now as well as to the West, RECONSTRUCTING AS THEY GO.

Sir, to-day a child will be born into this nation of thirty-five million people. When he casts his first ballot he will have stepped into his young manhood in the same nation numbering seventy millions. At forty-five he will be carving his fortune in the midst of the same nation, numbering one hundred and forty millions. At sixty-five, with the well-preserved powers of many of our members, he will take the place of one of us in this Hall, one of the honored Representatives of two hundred and

eighty million people! Yes, sir, one of our pages of to-day may live to be a Representative in this House when our people shall equal one quarter of the present population of the world! And where will these swarming, busy-working millions build their homes? Ah, sir, the sacred soil of even old Virginia, as well as the other States, will be invaded, not, indeed, with hate and sectional animosity, but carrying with them the blessings and institutions of civilization—not to destroy, but to rebuild. The waste places will be restored. In all the South the land that slavery has cursed will be reclaimed and made to bloom as a garden. Forests everywhere will disappear; swamps will be drained; the banks of rivers will be walled in; hill-sides and mountain precipices will be terraced to their summits; the Atlantic and Pacific will be tied together with bands of iron, and Europe and Asia will be our daily guests as they pass each other on our great railroads which are to be the highways of all nations. All laws founded upon caste will be repealed. All races and all sexes will be enfranchised. Man in his strength, and woman in her purity, stepping side by side to

the ballot-box, will redeem politics from the stigma of coarseness. Statesmen will take the place of demagogues in the canvass, and the people will demand that their reason shall be addressed instead of their prejudices. Education will keep pace with our material development, and religion, purified from superstition, will give its benediction. The prejudices of to-day will die out, and truth and justice resume the seats so long usurped by error and wrong.

Our neighbors on the north, by an irresistible attraction, will ask to join their destiny with ours, and with the consent of England, which will not be withheld, we will bid them welcome. And our other neighbors on the south, wearied with an age of internal strife, will silence their factions and come to us to find peace under our flag, and we will bid them welcome. And that banner of beauty and glory that floats over your seat, with its galaxy increased to a hundred stars—the emblem of resistless power, and carrying in its folds freedom, justice, and protection to all—will wave over a reconstructed country without a traitor, embracing the continent without a slave.